

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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R 090612Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0181

INFO AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL NHA TRANT

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 14105

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT VS

SUBJECT: AN QUANG HSC SEGMENT REPEATS OPPOSITION TO THIEU AND
APPROVAL OF FR. THANH

1. SUMMARY. CONTRARY TO AP DESPATCH OF NOV 5 SAYING THAT
AN QUANG BUDDHISTS HAVE JOINED FR THANH'S MOVEMENT IN CALLING
FOR RESIGNATION OF PRES THIEU, REALITY IS THAT ONE SEGMENT OF
HSC HAS ISSUED AMBIGUOUS ANTI-GOVT STATEMENTS WHICH ARE NOT
CLEARLY ANY TOUGHER THAN SIMILAR STATEMENTS IN PAST. (ANOTHER
REALITY IS THAT FR THANH HIMSELF HAS NOT PUBLICLY CALLED FOR
THIEU'S RESIGNATION.) AT THE SAME TIME, AN QUANG SPOKESMAN
HAS EXPRESSED SYMPATHY FOR CATHOLIC ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT,
PUTTING HIMSELF IN OPPOSITION TO AT LEAST TWO OTHER HSC
MEMBERS. ONLY SAFE CONCLUSION IS THAT AN QUANG HSC IS SPLIT
ON AT LEAST TWO IMPORTANT ISSUES. END SUMMARY.

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2. OPPOSITION TO PRES THIEU. AN QUANG HIGH SECULAR COUNCIL (HSC) RECTOR THICH TRI THU NOV 1 MADE TOUGH STATEMENT OF OPPOSITION TO PRESENT GOVT, CALLING AUTHORITIES "INCOMPETENT" AND A "SERIOUS OBSTACLE TO PEACE: AND SAYING THAT "BUDDHISTS CAN NEVER ACCEPT THE MAN (NOW) IN AUTHORITY." TRI THU HAS IN RECENT WEEKS CALLED ON THIEU TO "JUDGE YOURSELF AND TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION," WHICH CAN BE INTERPRETED AS A SUGGESTION THAT THE PRESIDENT STEP DOWN (SAIGON 13290). WHETHER TRI THU'S NOV 1 SEEMINGLY TOUGHER FORMULATION WAS MEANT TO INDICATE INCREASED OPPOSITION TO THE PRESIDENT IS UNCLEAR. IN SUBSTANCE, OF COURSE, TRI THU IS SIMPLY REPEATING LONG-STANDING AN QUANG OPPOSITION TO CONTINUANCE IN OFFICE OF PRES THIEU. AN QUANG MODERATE SEN TON THAT NIEM TOLD US NOV 8 THAT TRI THU WAS ECHOING POSITION OF THICH TRI QUANG, WHO HAS LONG HAD DEEP PERSONAL AVERSION FOR THIEU, AS OPPOSED TO SOME OTHER HSC MEMBERS WHO ARE SIMPLY AGAINST CERTAIN OF THIEU'S POLICIES. NIEM SAID THAT HE DOUBTED THAT TRI QUANG'S POSITION WOULD BE SUPPORTED BY A MAJORITY OF THE HSC IN A VOTE. SINCE TRI QUANG HAS THE SUPPORT OF THE HSC RECTOR (TRI THU) AND THE HSC "SPOKESMAN" (QUANG DO), HOWEVER, HE IS ABLE TO MAKE HIS EXTREME STATEMENTS OF OPPOSITION TO THE PRESIDENT APPEAR TO BE THE OFFICIAL AN QUANG POSITION.

3. IN DANANG, ALSO ON NATIONAL DAY, PRINCIPAL REPRESENTATIVE OF DANANG AN QUANG UNIFIED BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION (UBA) THICH QUANG THE RECALLED BUDDHIST ROLE IN FORCING REMOVAL OF DIEM AND CALLED ON PRESIDENT TO RECOGNIZE OWN INCAPACITY AND RESIGN, TO BE REPLACED BY "PEACE CABINET".

4. IN SAIGON, AN QUANG HSC SPOKESMAN VEN. QUANG DO IS REPORTED BY CHINH LUAN TO HAVE TOLD NEWSMEN NOV 5 THAT THE UBA AGREES WITH FR THANH'S MOVEMENT IN THAT BOTH "CALL FOR (THREE VIETNAMESE WORDS DELETED; PRESUMABLY, PRES THIEU) TO RESIGN." (PACM HAS IN FACT NOT TAKEN THIS POSITION PUBLICLY, THOUGH WE UNDERSTAND THAT ITS LEADERS ARE IN AGREEMENT PRIVATELY THAT THE REMOVAL OF PRES THIEU IS ONE OF THEIR AIMS.) QUANG DO ADDED THAT "UBA VIEWPOINT SINCE 1966 HAS BEEN NOT TO RECOGNIZE (THREE VIETNAMESE WORDS MISSING) AS NATIONAL LEADER." ACCORDING TO TWO WESTERN NEWSMEN, HOWEVER, QUANG DO REFUSED IN A PRIVATE TALK AFTER HIS PRESS CONFERENCE TO CONFIRM THAT

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AN QUANG DEMANDED THAT PRES THIEU GO, MAINTAINING THAT "A MORE OPEN APPROACH" (NOT SPECIFIED) TO NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE COMMUNISTS ON THE PRESIDENT'S PART WILL SATISFY THE AN QUANG BUDDHISTS.

5. VEN. HO GIAC, HSC COMMISSIONER GENERAL FOR SOCIAL WELFARE, TOLD US NOV 7 THAT WHAT VIETNAM NEEDS ARE IMPORTANT CHANGES IN POLICY, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO MORE COOPERATION WITH

THE RELIGIONS, WHETHER THEY ARE MADE BY PRES THIEU OR SOMEONE ELSE, THUS IMPLYING THAT THE REMOVAL OF THIEU IS NOT NECESSARILY AN AN QUANG AIM.

6. RAPPROCHEMENT WITH FR THANH. VEN. QUANG DO IN THE SAME PRESS CONFERENCE ALSO INDICATED THAT THE UBA IS IN AGREEMENT WITH THE PEOPLE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT (PACM) OF FR THANH. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME ANY AN QUANG OFFICIAL HAS EXPRESSED PUBLIC SYMPATHY FOR PACM. QUANG DO THUS PUT HIMSELF IN OPPOSITION WITH TWO OTHER HSC MEMBERS (THICH HO GIAC AND THICH GIAC DUC) WHO SEVERAL DAYS PREVIOUSLY HAD WARNED BUDDHISTS TO AVOID INVOLVEMENT WITH FR THANH. (AT A NOVEMBER 1 NATIONAL DAY CEREMONY GIAC DUC ALSO WARNED HIS AUDIENCE AGAINST STREET DEMONSTRATIONS.) QUANG DO FOR HIS PART MADE A POINT OF REMINDING HIS LISTENERS THAT UBA DOES NOT APPROVE OF DEMONSTRATIONS THAT ARE VIOLENT.

7. COMMENT: IT IS HARD TO CONCLUDE ANYTHING FROM THE ABOVE EXCEPT THAT THERE IS DISAGREEMENT WITHIN THE HSC ON THE TWO IMPORTANT POINTS COVERED. ONE GROUP, INCLUDING QUANG DO AND PROBABLY TRI QUANG AND RECTOR TRI THU, SEEMS TO FAVOR A HARsher PUBLIC ATTITUDE TOWARD THE THIEU ADMINISTRATION THAN MEMBERS LIKE HO GIAC. EVEN THE GROUP FOR WHICH QUANG DO IS SPOKESMAN, HOWEVER, SEEMS TO BE DOING NO MORE THAN REITERATING WHAT SINCE 1966 HAS BEEN AN AN QUANG WISH, TO REPLACE PRESIDENT THIEU WITH SOMEONE MORE IN AGREEMENT WITH THEIR IDEA OF HOW TO END THE WAR. BOTH GROUPS HAVE RESERVATIONS ABOUT STREET DEMONSTRATIONS ESPECIALLY IF THERE APPEARS TO BE A RISK OF VIOLENCE. THE STRONGEST STATEMENT OF ALL COMES FROM DANANG, BUT WE ARE UNAWARE TO WHAT EXTENT THE AN QUANG LEADER THERE WAS REFLECTING THE VIEWPOINT OF ANY FACTION WITHIN THE HSC.

8. AS FAR AS COOPERATION WITH FR THANH IS CONCERNED, THERE IS NOW A PUBLIC SPLIT WITHIN THE HSC. HO GIAC AND
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GIAC DU (AND PROBABLY OTHERS) REMAIN SUSPICIOUS OF THE CATHOLICS, WHILE QUANG DO AND FRIENDS HAVE NOW TAKEN A PUBLIC STEP IN FR THANH'S DIRECTION. IT IS MUCH TOO EARLY TO TELL WHETHER ONE AN QUANG SEGMENT'S EXPRESSION OF SYMPATHY FOR PACM WILL EVENTUALLY RESULT IN MEANINGFUL CATHOLIC-BUDDHIST COOPERATION. PAST HISTORY OF ANIMOSITY BETWEEN TWO SUGGESTS THAT SUCH COOPERATION UNLIKELY. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT QUANG DO APPARENTLY KEYED HIS AGREEMENT WITH PACM SPECIFICALLY TO PACM'S SUPPOSED CALL FOR THIEU'S RESIGNATION. IN ANY CASE, WE DOUBT THAT THIS ONE SUPPOSED POINT OF AGREEMENT WILL BE ENOUGH TO OVERCOME THE SERIOUS OBSTACLES TO AN QUANG-CATHOLIC COORDINATION OF THEIR OPPOSITION EFFORTS.
MARTIN

NOTE BY OCT: NOT PASSED IBS/NCA.

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